

**THE AMERICAN VETERAN  
EDITION 2  
PART 4**

WELCOME BACK, THIS IS THE AMERICAN VETERAN. I'M JIM BENSON.

ON FEBRUARY EIGHTEENTH, JAMES NICHOLSON WAS SWORN IN AS THE FIFTH SECRETARY OF VETERANS AFFAIRS. PRIOR TO HIS CONFIRMATION, MR. NICHOLSON SERVED AS AMBASSADOR TO THE VATICAN. IN ADDITION, HE IS PAST-CHAIRMAN OF THE REPUBLICAN NATIONAL COMMITTEE. A WEST POINT GRADUATE AND A DECORATED VIETNAM COMBAT VETERAN, HE WHO SPENT 8 YEARS ON ACTIVE DUTY. AFTER 22 MORE YEARS IN THE ARMY RESERVE HE RETIRED WITH THE RANK OF COLONEL. I RECENTLY HAD THE OPPORTUNITY TO SIT DOWN WITH THE SECRETARY AND TALK ABOUT HIS VISION FOR VA.

SECRETARY NICHOLSON: IT IS A BIG ORGANIZATION WITH GREAT RESPONSIBILITIES TO MILLIONS AND MILLIONS OF PEOPLE AND IT HAS REALLY TAKEN A TURN TOWARD THE 21ST CENTURY WHERE IT NEEDS TO BE BOTH IN THE PRACTICE OF MEDICINE, THE FACILITIES, METHODS, THE TRAINING, AND WHAT I WANT TO DO IS KEEP IT MOVING FORWARD SO THAT WE ARE ABSOLUTELY ON THE CUTTING EDGE OF HEALTH-CARE DELIVERY. WE WANT TO BE THERE FOR THE VETERANS THAT NEED US AND WE WANT TO BE THERE EFFECTIVELY, RESPONSIBLY, CONSISTENTLY AND WITH COMPASSION. AND ALLOWING OUR VETERANS TO HAVE THE DIGNITY THEY DESERVE FOR THEIR SERVICE.

BENSON: ONE OF THE KEY AREAS THAT WE SEE A LOT IN THE PRESS TODAY AND THAT IS ABOUT THE SEAMLESS TRANSITION THAT WE TRY TO PROVIDE FROM THE MILITARY TO THE CIVILIAN LIFE AND COMING BACK FROM COMBAT. HOW DO YOU FORESEE VA MOVING FORWARD IN THAT AREA?

SECRETARY NICHOLSON: WE'RE WORKING VERY CLOSELY WITH THE DEPARTMENT OF DEFENSE TO MAKE SURE ALL OF THESE PEOPLE KNOW BEFORE THEY RETURN AND SCATTER, ESPECIALLY THOSE THAT ARE IN THE RESERVE AND GUARDS, THAT WE'RE HERE FOR THEM AND THAT THEY HAVE THINGS THAT THEY ARE ENTITLED TO THAT THEY'VE EARNED.

BENSON: HOW DO YOU FEEL THE MILITARY EXPERIENCE THAT YOU HAVE HAD HAS PREPARED YOU TO HEAD UP THE VA NOW?

SECRETARY NICHOLSON: WELL, THE MILITARY EXPERIENCE I'VE HAD IS PROBABLY THE MOST IMPORTANT EXPERIENCE I HAVE HAD IN MY LIFE, STARTING WITH THE DAYS THAT I WAS A CADET AT WEST POINT. IT DEFINES ME, I THINK, BECAUSE OF THE ETHIC OF SERVICE, OF DISCIPLINE, OF TEAMWORK, COHESION, MISSION FOCUS, AND CAMARADERIE AND FRIENDSHIP.

BENSON: AND A MESSAGE PERHAPS FOR THE NATION'S VETERANS AND

THEIR FAMILIES

SECRETARY NICHOLSON: THE PRIORITY, THE ESTEEM THAT OUR SOCIETY PUTS OUR VETERANS IN AND BEING A VETERAN, OF COURSE, THAT MAKES ME FEEL GOOD BUT BEING AN AMERICAN IT ALSO MAKES ME FEEL GREAT BECAUSE WE HAVE A WONDERFUL ORGANIZATION HERE THAT OUR COUNTRYMEN ARE GOING TO SPEND \$70 BILLION OR SO A YEAR BECAUSE THEY WANT TO TAKE CARE OF OUR VETERANS AND WE ARE THE PEOPLE WHO HAVE THE JOB THAT THEY'VE DELEGATED TO US. WE ARE THE AGENT FOR THEM AND SO, TO OUR VETERANS I'D SAY, FOR THOSE THAT ARE IN NEED WE'RE HERE FOR YOU.

BENSON: THE SECRETARY HAS THREE NEPHEWS THAT HAVE SERVED OR ARE SERVING IN IRAQ. WE WISH THEM AND ALL OUR MILITARY PERSONNEL THE BEST. IT IS OUR DUTY AND HONOR TO SERVE THOSE WHO HAVE SERVED OUR COUNTRY SO WELL. THE DEPARTMENT OF VETERANS AFFAIRS STRIVES TO HELP AMERICA'S VETERANS EVERY DAY.

IF YOU WOULD LIKE TO CONTACT US ABOUT THE STORIES ON THIS PROGRAM OR FOR ANY OTHER REASON, HERE ARE A FEW WAYS TO DO SO. CALL US AT 1-800-827-1000; VISIT US ON THE WEB AT [WWW.VA.GOV](http://WWW.VA.GOV) OR VISIT YOUR NEAREST VET CENTER.

AND THAT WRAPS UP ANOTHER EDITION OF "THE AMERICAN VETERAN." WE THANK YOU FOR JOINING US FOR THIS HALF HOUR. WE'LL BE BACK WITH MORE REPORTS DESIGNED JUST FOR YOU: THE AMERICAN VETERAN.

FOR THE DEPARTMENT OF VETERANS AFFAIRS, I'M JIM BENSON. SEE YOU NEXT TIME.

PRODUCED BY THE DEPARTMENT OF VETERANS AFFAIRS.

END OF TRANSCRIPT